

## THE BREVIARY OF ÆSTHETIC<sup>1</sup>

### I

#### "WHAT IS ART?"

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**I**N reply to the question, "What is art?", it might be said jocosely (but this would not be a bad joke) that art is what everybody knows it to be. And indeed, if it were not to some extent known what it is, it would be impossible even to ask that question, for every question implies a certain knowledge of what is asked about, designated in the question and therefore known and qualified. A proof of this is to be found in the fact that we often hear expressed just and profound ideas in relation to art by those who make no profession of philosophy or of theory, by laymen, by artists who do not like to reason, by the ingenuous, and even by the common people: these ideas are sometimes implicit in judgments concerning particular works of art, but at others assume altogether the form of aphorisms and of definitions. Thus it happens that there arises the belief in the possibility of making blush, at will, any proud philosopher who should believe himself to have "discovered" the nature of art, by placing before his eyes or making ring in his ears propositions taken from the most superficial books or phrases of the most ordinary conversation, and shewing that they already most clearly contained his vaunted discovery.

And in this case the philosopher would have good reason to blush—that is, had he ever nourished the illusion of introducing into universal human consciousness, by means of his

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doctrines, something altogether original, something extraneous to this consciousness, the revelation of an altogether new world. But he does not blush, and continues upon his way, for he is not ignorant that the question as to what is art (as indeed every philosophical question as to the nature of the real, or in general every question of knowledge), even if by its use of language it seem to assume the aspect of a general and total problem, which it is claimed to solve for the first and last time, has always, as a matter of fact, a *circumscribed* meaning, referable to the particular difficulties that assume vitality at a determined moment in the history of thought. Certainly, truth does walk the streets, like the *esprit* of the well-known French proverb, or like metaphor, "queen of tropes" according to rhetoricians, which Montaigne discovered in the *babil* of his *chambrière*. But the metaphor used by the maid is the solution of a problem of expression proper to the feelings that affect the maid at that moment; and the obvious affirmations that by accident or intent one hears every day as to the nature of art, are solutions of logical problems, as they present themselves to this or that individual, who is not a philosopher by profession, and yet as man is also to some extent a philosopher. And as the maid's metaphor usually expresses but a small and vulgar world of feeling compared with that of the poet, so the obvious affirmation of one who is not a philosopher solves a problem small by comparison with that which occupies the philosopher. The answer as to what is art may appear similar in both cases, but is different in both cases owing to the different degree of richness of its intimate content; because the answer of the philosopher worthy of the name has neither more nor less than the task of solving in an adequate manner all the problems as to the nature of art that have arisen down to that moment in the course of history;

whereas that of the layman, since it revolves in a far narrower space, shews itself to be impotent outside those limits. Actual proof of this is also to be found in the force of the eternal Socratic method, in the facility with which the learned, by pressing home their questions, leave those without learning in open-mouthed confusion, though these had nevertheless begun by speaking well; but now finding themselves, in the course of the inquiry, in danger of losing what small knowledge they possessed, they have no resource but to retire into their shell, declaring that they do not like “subtleties.”

The philosopher’s pride is solely based therefore upon the greater intensity of his questions and answers; a pride not unaccompanied with modesty—that is, with the consciousness that if his sphere be wider, or the largest possible, at a determined moment, yet it is limited by the history of that moment, and cannot pretend to a value of totality, or what is called a *definite* solution. The ulterior life of the spirit, renewing and multiplying problems, does not so much falsify, as render inadequate preceding solutions, part of them falling among the number of those truths that are understood, and part needing to be again taken up and integrated. A system is a house, which, as soon as it has been built and decorated, has need of continuous labour, more or less energetic, in order to keep it in repair (subject as it is to the corrosive action of the elements); and at a certain moment there is no longer any use in restoring and propping up the system, we must demolish and reconstruct it from top to bottom. But with this capital difference: that in the work of thought, the perpetually new house is perpetually maintained by the old one, which persists in it, almost by an act of magic. As we know, those superficial or ingenuous souls that are ignorant of this magic are terrified at it; so much so,

that one of their tiresome refrains against philosophy is that it continually undoes its work, and that one philosopher contradicts another: as though man did not always make and unmake his houses, and as though the architect that follows did not always contradict the architect that precedes; and as though it were possible to draw the conclusion from this making and unmaking of houses and from this contradiction among architects, that it is useless to make houses!

The answers of the philosopher, though they have the advantage of greater intensity, also carry with them the dangers of greater error, and are often vitiated by a sort of lack of good sense, which has an aristocratic character, in so far as it belongs to a superior sphere of culture, and even when meriting reproof, is the object not only of disdain and derision, but also of secret envy and admiration. This is the foundation of the contrast, that many delight to illustrate, between the mental equilibrium of ordinary people and the extravagances of philosophers; since, for example, it is clear that no man of good sense would have said that art is a reflexion of the sexual instinct, or that it is something maleficent and deserves to be banned from well-ordered republics. These absurdities have, however, been uttered by philosophers and even by great philosophers. But the innocence of the man of common sense is poverty, the innocence of the savage; and though there have often been sighs for the life of the savage, and a remedy has been called for to rescue good sense from philosophies, it remains a fact that the spirit, in its development, courageously affronts the dangers of civilisation and the momentary loss of good sense. The researches of the philosopher in relation to art must tread the paths of error in order to find the path of truth, which does not differ from, but is, those very paths of error which contain a clue to the labyrinth.

The close connection of error and truth arises from the fact that a complete and total error is inconceivable, and, since it is inconceivable, does not exist. Error speaks with two voices, one of which affirms the false, but the other denies it; it is a colliding of yes and no, which is called contradiction. Therefore, when we descend from general considerations to the examination of a theory that has been condemned as erroneous in its definite particulars, we find the cure in the theory itself—that is, the true theory, which grows out of the soil of error. Thus it happens that those very people who claim to reduce art to the sexual instinct, in order to demonstrate their thesis have recourse to arguments and meditations which, instead of uniting, separate art from that instinct; or that he who would expel poetry from the well-constituted republic, shudders in so doing, and himself creates a new and sublime poetry. There have been historical periods in which the most crude and perverted doctrines of art have dominated; yet this did not prevent the habitual and secure separation of the beautiful from the ugly at those periods, nor the very subtle discussion of the theme when the abstract theory was forgotten and particular cases were studied. Error is always condemned, not by the mouth of the judge, but *ex ore suo*.

Owing to this close connection with error, the affirmation of the truth is always a process of strife, by means of which it keeps freeing itself in error from error; whence arises another pious but impossible desire, namely, that which demands that truth should be directly exposed, without discussion or polemic; that it should be permitted to proceed majestically alone upon its way: as if this stage parade were the symbol suited to truth, which is thought itself, and, as thought, ever active and in labour. Indeed, nobody succeeds in exposing a truth, save by criticising the different solutions

of the problem with which it is connected; and there is no philosophical treatise, however weak, no little scholastic manual or academic dissertation, which does not collect at its beginning or contain in its body a review of opinions, historically given or ideally possible, which it wishes to oppose or to correct. This fact, though frequently realised in a capricious and disorderly manner, just expresses the legitimate desire to pass in review all the solutions that have been attempted in history or are possible of achievement in idea (that is, at the present moment, though always in history), in such a way that the new solution shall include in itself all the preceding labour of the human spirit.

But this demand is a *logical* demand, and as such intrinsic to every true thought and inseparable from it; and we must not confound it with a definite literary form of exposition, in order that we may not fall into the pedantry for which the scholastics of the Middle Ages and the dialecticians of the school of Hegel in the nineteenth century became celebrated, which is very closely connected with the formalistic superstition, and represents a belief in the marvellous virtue of a certain sort of extrinsic and mechanical philosophical exposition. We must, in short, understand it in a substantial, not in an accidental sense, respecting the spirit, not the letter, and proceed with freedom in the exposition of our own thought, according to time, place, and person. Thus, in these rapid lectures intended to provide as it were a guide to the right way of thinking out problems of art, I shall carefully refrain from narrating (as I have done elsewhere) the whole process of liberation from erroneous conceptions of art, mounting upwards from the poorest to the richest; and I shall cast far away, not from myself, but from my readers, a part of the baggage with which they will charge themselves when, prompted thereto by the sight of

the country passed over in our bird's flight, they shall set themselves to accomplish more particular voyages in this or that part of it, or to cross it again from end to end.

However, connecting the question which has given occasion to this indispensable prologue (indispensable for the purpose of removing from my discourse every appearance of pretentiousness, and also all blemish of inutility),—the question as to what is art,—I will say at once, in the simplest manner, that art is *vision* or *intuition*. The artist produces an image or a phantasm; and he who enjoys art turns his gaze upon the point to which the artist has pointed, looks through the chink which he has opened, and reproduces that image in himself. “Intuition,” “vision,” “contemplation,” “imagination,” “fancy,” “figurations,” “representations,” and so on, are words continually recurring, like synonyms, when discoursing upon art, and they all lead the mind to the same conceptual sphere which indicates general agreement.

But this reply, that art is intuition, obtains its force and meaning from all that it implicitly denies and from which it distinguishes art. What negations are implicit in it? I shall indicate the principal, or at least those that are the most important for us at this present moment of our culture.

It denies, above all, that art is a *physical fact*: for example, certain determined colours, or relations of colours; certain definite forms of bodies; certain definite sounds, or relations of sounds; certain phenomena of heat or of electricity—in short, whatsoever be designated as “physical.” The inclination toward this error of physicising art is already present in ordinary thought, and as children who touch the soap-bubble and would wish to touch the rainbow, so the human spirit, admiring beautiful things, hastens spontaneously to trace out the reasons for them in external nature, and proves that it must think, or believes that it

should think, certain colours beautiful and certain other colours ugly, certain forms beautiful and certain other forms ugly. But this attempt has been carried out intentionally and with method on several occasions in the history of thought: from the "canons" which the Greek theoreticians and artists fixed for the beauty of bodies, through the speculations as to the geometrical and numerical relations of figures and sounds, down to the researches of the æstheticians of the nineteenth century (Fechner, for example), and to the "communications" presented in our day by the inexpert, at philosophical, psychological, and natural science congresses, concerning the relations of physical phenomena with art. And if it be asked why art cannot be a physical fact, we must reply, in the first place, that physical facts *do not possess reality*, and that art, to which so many devote their whole lives and which fills all with a divine joy, is *supremely real*; thus it cannot be a physical fact, which is something unreal. This sounds at first paradoxical, for nothing seems more solid and secure to the ordinary man than the physical world; but we, in the seat of truth, must not abstain from the good reason and substitute for it one less good, solely because the first should have the appearance of a lie; and besides, in order to surpass what of strange and difficult may be contained in that truth, to become at home with it, we may take into consideration the fact that the demonstration of the unreality of the physical world has not only been proved in an indisputable manner and is admitted by all philosophers (who are not crass materialists and are not involved in the strident contradictions of materialism), but is professed by these same physicists in the spontaneous philosophy which they mingle with their physics, when they conceive physical phenomena as products of principles that are beyond experience, of atoms or of ether,



or as the manifestation of an Unknowable: besides, the matter itself of the materialists is a supermaterial principle. Thus physical facts reveal themselves, by their internal logic and by common consent, not as reality, but as a *construction of our intellect for the purposes of science*. Consequently, the question whether art be a physical fact must rationally assume this different signification: that is to say, *whether it be possible to construct art physically*. And this is certainly possible, for we indeed carry it out always, when, turning from the sense of a poem and ceasing to enjoy it, we set ourselves, for example, to count the words of which the poem is composed and to divide them into syllables and letters; or, disregarding the æsthetic effect of a statue, we weigh and measure it: a most useful performance for the packers of statues, as is the other for the typographers who have to “compose” pages of poetry; but most useless for the contemplator and student of art, to whom it is neither useful nor licit to allow himself to be “distracted” from his proper object. Thus art is not a physical fact in this second sense, either; which amounts to saying that when we propose to ourselves to penetrate its nature and mode of action, to construct it physically is of no avail.

Another negation is implied in the definition of art as intuition: if it be intuition, and intuition is equivalent to *theory* in the original sense of contemplation, art cannot be a utilitarian act; and since a utilitarian act aims always at obtaining a pleasure and therefore at keeping off a pain, art, considered in its own nature, has nothing to do with the *useful* and with *pleasure* and *pain*, as such. It will be admitted, indeed, without much difficulty, that a pleasure as a pleasure, any sort of pleasure, is not of itself artistic; the pleasure of a drink of water that slakes thirst, or a walk in the open air that stretches our limbs and makes our blood

circulate more lightly, or the obtaining of a longed-for post that settles us in practical life, and so on, is not artistic. Finally, the difference between pleasure and art leaps to the eyes in the relations that are developed between ourselves and works of art, because the figure represented may be dear to us and represent the most delightful memories, and at the same time the picture may be ugly; or, on the other hand, the picture may be beautiful and the figure represented hateful to our hearts, or the picture itself, which we approve as beautiful, may also cause us rage and envy, because it is the work of our enemy or rival, for whom it will procure advantage and on whom it will confer new strength: our practical interests, with their relative pleasures and pains, mingle and sometimes become confused with art and disturb, but are never *identified* with, our æsthetic interest. At the most it will be affirmed, with a view to maintaining more effectively the definition of art as the pleasurable, that it is not the pleasurable in general, but a *particular* form of the pleasurable. But such a restriction is no longer a defence, it is indeed an abandonment of that thesis; for given that art is a particular form of pleasure, its distinctive character would be supplied, not by the pleasurable, but by what distinguishes that pleasurable from other pleasurables, and it would be desirable to turn the attention to that distinctive element—more than pleasurable or different from pleasurable. Nevertheless, the doctrine that defines art as the pleasurable has a special denomination (hedonistic æsthetic), and a long and complicated development in the history of æsthetic doctrines: it shewed itself in the Græco-Roman world, prevailed in the eighteenth century, reflowered in the second half of the nineteenth, and still enjoys much favour, being especially well received by beginners in æsthetic, who are above all struck by the fact that art causes pleasure. The life of this

doctrine has consisted of proposing in turn one or another class of pleasures, or several classes together (the pleasure of the superior senses, the pleasure of play, of consciousness of our own strength, of criticism, etc., etc.), or of adding to it elements differing from the pleasurable, the useful for example (when understood as distinct from the pleasurable), the satisfaction of cognoscitive and moral wants, and the like. And its progress has been caused just by this restlessness, and by its allowing foreign elements to ferment in its bosom, which it introduces through the necessity of somehow bringing itself into agreement with the reality of art, thus attaining to its dissolution as hedonistic doctrine and to the promotion of a new doctrine, or at least to drawing attention to its necessity. And since every error has its element of truth (and that of the physical doctrine has been seen to be the possibility of the physical “construction” of art as of any other fact), the hedonistic doctrine has its eternal element of truth in the placing in relief the hedonistic accompaniment, or pleasure, common to the æsthetic activity as to every form of spiritual activity, which it has not at all been intended to deny in absolutely denying the identification of art with the pleasurable, and in distinguishing it from the pleasurable by defining it as intuition.

A third negation, effected by means of the theory of art as intuition, is that art is a *moral act*; that is to say, that form of practical act which, although necessarily uniting with the useful and with pleasure and pain, is not immediately utilitarian and hedonistic, and moves in a superior spiritual sphere. But the intuition, in so far as it is a theoretic act, is opposed to the practical of any sort. And in truth, art, as has been remarked from the earliest times, does not arise as an act of the will; good will, which constitutes the honest man, does not constitute the artist. And since it is not the result of an

act of will, so it escapes all moral discrimination, not because a privilege of exemption is accorded to it, but simply because moral discrimination cannot be applied to art. An artistic image portrays an act morally praiseworthy or blameworthy; but this image, as image, is neither morally praiseworthy nor blameworthy. Not only is there no penal code that can condemn an image to prison or to death, but no moral judgment, uttered by a rational person, can make of it its object: we might just as well judge the square moral or the triangle immoral as the Francesca of Dante immoral or the Cordelia of Shakespeare moral, for these have a purely artistic function, they are like musical notes in the souls of Dante and of Shakespeare. Further, the moralistic theory of art is also represented in the history of *æsthetic* doctrines, though much discredited in the common opinion of our times, not only on account of its intrinsic demerit, but also, in some measure, owing to the moral demerit of certain tendencies of our times, which render possible, owing to psychological dislike, that refutation of it which should be made—and which we here make—solely for logical reasons. The end attributed to art, of directing the good and inspiring horror of evil, of correcting and ameliorating customs, is a derivation of the moralistic doctrine; and so is the demand addressed to artists to collaborate in the education of the lower classes, in the strengthening of the national or bellicose spirit of a people, in the diffusion of the ideals of a modest and laborious life; and so on. These are all things that art cannot do, any more than geometry, which, however, does not lose anything of its importance on account of its inability to do this; and one does not see why art should do so, either. That it cannot do these things was partially perceived by the moralistic *æstheticians* also; who very readily effected a transaction with it, permitting it to provide pleasures that

were not moral, provided they were not openly dishonest, or recommending it to employ to a good end the dominion that, owing to its hedonistic power, it possessed over souls, to gild the pill, to sprinkle sweetness upon the rim of the glass containing the bitter draught—in short, to play the courtesan (since it could not get rid of its old and inborn habits), in the service of holy church or of morality: *meretrix ecclesiæ*. On other occasions they have sought to avail themselves of it for purposes of instruction, since not only virtue but also science is a difficult thing, and art could remove this difficulty and render pleasant and attractive the entrance into the ocean of science—indeed, lead them through it as through a garden of Armida, gaily and voluptuously, without their being conscious of the lofty protection they had obtained, or of the crisis of renovation which they were preparing for themselves. We cannot now refrain from a smile when we talk of these theories, but should not forget that they were once a serious matter corresponding to a serious effort to understand the nature of art and to elevate the conception of it; and that among those who believed in it (to limit ourselves to Italian literature) were Dante and Tasso, Parini and Alfieri, Manzoni and Mazzini. And the moralistic doctrine of art was and is and will be perpetually beneficial by its very contradictions; it was and will be an effort, however unhappy, to separate art from the merely pleasing, with which it is sometimes confused, and to assign to it a more worthy post: and it, too, has its true side, because, if art be beyond morality, the artist is neither this side of it nor that, but under its empire, in so far as he is a man who cannot withdraw himself from the duties of man, and must look upon art itself—art, which is not and never will be moral—as a mission to be exercised as a priestly office.

Again (and this is the last and perhaps the most important of all the general negations that it suits me to recall in relation to this matter), with the definition of art as intuition, we deny that it has the character of *conceptual knowledge*. Conceptual knowledge, in its true form, which is the philosophical, is always realistic, aiming at establishing reality against unreality, or at lowering unreality by including it in reality as a subordinate moment of reality itself. But intuition means, precisely, indistinction of reality and unreality, the image with its value as mere image, the pure ideality of the image; and opposing the intuitive or sensible knowledge to the conceptual or intelligible, the æsthetic to the noetic, it aims at claiming the autonomy of this more simple and elementary form of knowledge, which has been compared to the dream (the dream, and not the sleep) of the theoretic life, in respect to which philosophy would be the waking. And indeed, whoever should ask, when examining a work of art, whether what the artist has expressed be metaphysically and historically true or false, asks a question that is without meaning, and commits an error analogous to his who should bring the airy images of the fancy before the tribunal of morality: without meaning, because the discrimination of true and false always concerns an affirmation of reality, or a judgment, but it cannot fall under the head of an image or of a pure subject, which is not the subject of a judgment, since it is without qualification or predicate. It is useless to object that the individuality of the image cannot subsist without reference to the universal, of which that image is the individuation, because we do not here deny that the universal, as the spirit of God, is everywhere and animates all things with itself, but we deny that the universal is rendered logically explicit and is thought in the intuition. Useless also is the appeal to the principle

of the unity of the spirit, which is not broken, but, on the contrary, strengthened by the clear distinction of fancy from thought, because from the distinction comes opposition, and from opposition concrete unity.

Ideality (as has also been called this character that distinguishes the intuition from the concept, art from philosophy and from history, from the affirmation of the universal and from the perception or narration of what has happened) is the intimate virtue of art: no sooner are reflection and judgment developed from that ideality, than art is dissipated and dies: it dies in the artist, who becomes a critic; it dies in the contemplator, who changes from an entranced enjoyer of art to a meditative observer of life.

But the distinction of art from philosophy (taken widely as including all thinking of the real) brings with it other distinctions, among which that of art from *myth* occupies the foremost place. For myth, to him who believes in it, presents itself as the revelation and knowledge of reality as opposed to unreality,—a reality that drives away other beliefs as illusory or false. It can become art only for him who no longer believes in it and avails himself of mythology as a metaphor, of the austere world of the gods as of a beautiful world, of God as of an image of sublimity. Considered, then, in its genuine reality, in the soul of the believer and not of the unbeliever, it is religion and not simple fancy; and religion is philosophy, philosophy in process of becoming, philosophy more or less imperfect, but philosophy, as philosophy is religion, more or less purified and elaborated, in continuous process of elaboration and purification, but religion or thought of the Absolute or Eternal. Art lacks the thought that is necessary ere it can become myth and religion, and the faith that is born of thought; the artist neither believes nor disbelieves in his image: he produces

it. And, for a different reason, the concept of art as intuition excludes, on the other hand, the conception of art as the production of *classes and types, species and genera*, or again (as a great mathematician and philosopher had occasion to say of music), as an exercise of unconscious *arithmetic*; that is, it distinguishes art from the positive sciences and from mathematics, in both of which appears the conceptual form, though without realistic character, as mere general representation or mere abstraction. But that ideality which natural and mathematical science would seem to assume, as opposed to the world of philosophy, of religion and of history, and which would seem to approximate it to art (and owing to which scientists and mathematicians of our day are so ready to boast of creating worlds, of *fictions*, resembling the fictions and figurations of the poets, even in their vocabulary), is gained with the renunciation of concrete thought, by means of generalisation and abstraction, which are capricious, volitional decisions, practical acts, and, as practical acts, extraneous and inimical to the world of art. Thus it happens that art manifests much more repugnance toward the positive and mathematical sciences than toward philosophy, religion and history, because these seem to it to be fellow-citizens of the same world of theory or of knowledge, whereas those others shock it with the brutality toward contemplation of the practical world. Poetry and classification, and, worse still, poetry and mathematics, appear to be as little in agreement as fire and water: the *esprit mathématique* and the *esprit scientifique*, the most declared enemies of the *esprit poétique*; those periods in which the natural sciences and mathematics prevail (for example, the intellectualism of the eighteenth century) seem to be the least fruitful in poetry.

And since this vindication of the alogical character of art



is, as I have said, the most difficult and important of the negations included in the formula of art-intuition, the theories that attempt to explain art as philosophy, as religion, as history, or as science, and in a lesser degree as mathematics, occupy the greater part of the history of æsthetic science and are adorned with the names of the greatest philosophers. Schelling and Hegel afford examples of the identification or confusion of art with religion and philosophy in the eighteenth century; Taine, of its confusion with the natural sciences; the theories of the French verists, of its confusion with historical and documentary observation; the formalism of the Herbartians, of its confusion with mathematics. But it would be vain to seek pure examples of these errors in any of these authors and in the others that might be mentioned, because error is never pure, for if it were so, it would be truth. Thus the doctrines of art that for the sake of brevity I shall term “conceptualistic” contain elements of dissolution, the more copious and efficacious by as much as the spirit of the philosopher who professed them was energetic, and therefore nowhere are they so copious and efficacious as in Schelling and Hegel, who thus had so lively a consciousness of artistic production as to suggest by their observations and their particular developments a theory opposed to that maintained in their systems. Furthermore, the very conceptualistic theories are superior to the others previously examined, not only in so far as they recognise the *theoretic* character of art, but also carry with them their contribution to the true doctrine, owing to the claim that they make for a determination of the relations (which, if they be of distinction, are also of unity) between fancy and logic, between art and thought.

And here we can already see how the simplest formula, that “art is intuition,”—which, translated into other sym-

bolical terms (for example, that "art is the work of fancy"), is to be found in the mouths of all those who daily discuss art, and is to be found in older terms ("imitation," "fiction," "fable," etc.) in so many old books,—pronounced now in the text of a philosophical discourse, becomes filled with a historical, critical, and polemical content, of which I can hardly here give any example. And it will no longer cause astonishment that its philosophical conquest should have cost an especially great amount of toil, because that conquest is like setting foot upon a little hill long fought for in battle. Its easy ascent by the thoughtless pedestrian in time of peace is a very different matter; it is not a simple resting-place on a walk, but the symbol and result of the victory of an army. The historian of æsthetic follows the steps of its difficult progress, in which (and this is another magical act of thought) the conqueror, instead of losing strength through the blows that his adversary inflicts upon him, acquires new strength through these very blows, and reaches the sighed-for eminence, repulsing his adversary, and yet in his company. Here I cannot do more than record in passing the importance of the Aristotelian concept of *mimesis* (arising in opposition to the Platonic condemnation of poetry), and the attempt made by the same philosopher to distinguish *poetry* and *history*: a concept that was not sufficiently developed, and perhaps not altogether mature in his mind, and therefore long misunderstood, but which was yet to serve, after many centuries, as the point of departure for modern æsthetic thought. And I will mention in passing the ever-increasing consciousness of the difference between *logic* and *fancy*, between *judgment* and *taste*, between *intellect* and *genius*, which became ever more lively during the course of the seventeenth century, and the solemn form which the contest between *Poetry* and *Metaphysic* assumed in the "Scienza

Nuova" of Vico; and also the scholastic construction of an *Æsthetica*, distinct from a *Logica*, as *Gnoseologia inferior* and *Scientia cognitionis sensitivæ*, in Baumgarten, who, however, remained involved in the conceptualistic conception of art, and did not carry out his project; and the Critique of Kant directed against Baumgarten and all the Leibnitzians and Wolffians, which made it clear that intuition is intuition and not a "confused concept"; and romanticism, which perhaps better developed the new idea of art, announced by Vico, in its artistic criticism and in its histories than in its systems; and, finally, the criticism inaugurated in Italy by Francesco de Sanctis, who caused art as pure *form*, or pure intuition, to prevail over all utilitarianism, moralism, and conceptualism (to adopt his vocabulary).

But doubt springs up at the feet of truth, "like a young shoot,"—as the *terzina* of father Dante has it,—doubt, which is what drives the intellect of man "from mount to mount." The doctrine of art as intuition, as fancy, as form, now gives rise to an ulterior (I have not said an "ultimate") problem, which is no longer one of opposition and distinction toward physics, hedonistic, ethic and logic, but the field of images itself, which sets in doubt the capacity of the image to define the character of art and is in reality occupied with the mode of separating the genuine from the spurious image, and of enriching in this way the concept of the image and of art. What function (it is asked) can a world of pure images possess in the spirit of man, without philosophical, historical, religious or scientific value, and without even moral or hedonistic value? What is more vain than to dream with open eyes in life, which demands, not only open eyes, but an open mind and a nimble spirit? Pure images! But to nourish oneself upon pure images is called by a name of little honour, "to dream," and there is usually added to

this the epithet of "idle." It is a very insipid and inconclusive thing; can it ever be art? Certainly, we sometimes amuse ourselves with the reading of some sensational romance of adventure, where images follow images in the most various and unexpected way; but we thus enjoy ourselves in moments of fatigue, when we are obliged to kill time, and with a full consciousness that such stuff is not art. Such instances are of the nature of a pastime, a game; but were art a game or a pastime, it would fall into the wide arms of hedonistic doctrine, ever open to receive it. And it is a utilitarian and hedonistic need that impels us sometimes to relax the bow of the mind and the bow of the will, and to stretch ourselves, allowing images to follow one another in our memory, or combining them in quaint forms with the aid of the imagination, in a sort of waking sleep, from which we rouse ourselves as soon as we are rested; and we sometimes rouse ourselves just to devote ourselves to the work of art, which cannot be produced by a mind relaxed. Thus either art is not pure intuition, and the claims put forward in the doctrines which we believed we had above confuted, are not satisfied, and so the confutation itself of these doctrines is troubled with doubts; or intuition cannot consist in a simple act of imagination.

In order to render the problem more exact and more difficult, it will be well to eliminate from it at once that part to which the answer is easy, and which I have not wished to neglect, precisely because it is usually united and confused with it. The intuition is the product of an image, and not of an incoherent mass of images obtained by recalling former images and allowing them to succeed one another capriciously, by combining one image with another in a like capricious manner, joining a horse's neck to a human head, and thus playing a childish game. Old Poetic availed itself

above all of the concept of *unity*, in order to express this distinction between the intuition and imagining, insisting that whatever the artistic work, it should be *simplex et unum*; or of the allied concept of *unity in variety*—that is to say, the multiple images were to find their common centre unit of union in a comprehensive image: and the æsthetic of the nineteenth century created with the same object the distinction, which appears in not a few of its philosophers, between *fancy* (the peculiar artistic faculty) and *imagination* (the extra-artistic faculty). To amass, select, cut up, combine images, presupposes the possession of particular images in the spirit; and fancy produces, whereas imagination is sterile, adapted to extrinsic combinations and not to the generation of organism and life. The most profound problem, contained beneath the rather superficial formula with which I first presented it, is, then: What is the office of the pure image in the life of the spirit? or (which at bottom amounts to the same thing), How does the pure image come into existence? Every inspired work of art gives rise to a long series of imitators, who just repeat, cut up in pieces, combine, and mechanically exaggerate that work, and by so doing play the part of imagination toward or against the fancy. But what is the justification, or what the genesis, of the work of genius, which is afterward submitted (a sign of glory!) to such torments? In order to make this point clear, we must go deeply into the character of fancy or pure intuition.

And the best way to prepare this deeper study is to recall to mind and to criticise the theories with which it has been sought to differentiate artistic intuition from merely incoherent imagination (while taking care not to fall into realism or conceptualism), to establish in what the principle of unity consists, and to justify the productive character of the

fancy. The artistic image (it has been said) is such, when it unites the intelligible with the sensible, and represents an idea. Now "intelligible" and "idea" cannot mean anything but concept (nor has it a different meaning with those who maintain this doctrine); even though it be the concrete concept or idea, proper to lofty philosophical speculation, which differs from the abstract concept or from the representative concept of the sciences. But in any case, the concept or idea always unites the intelligible to the sensible, and not only in art, for the new concept of the concept, first stated by Kant and (so to speak) immanent in all modern thought, heals the breach between the sensible and the intelligible worlds, conceives the concept as judgment, and the judgment as synthesis *a priori*, and the synthesis *a priori* as the word become flesh, as history. Thus that definition of art leads the fancy back to logic and art to philosophy, contrary to intention; and is at most valid for the abstract conception of science, not for the problem of art (the æsthetic and teleological "Critique of Judgment" of Kant had precisely this historical function of correcting what of abstract there yet remained in the "Critique of Pure Reason"). To seek a sensible element for the concept, beyond that which it has already absorbed in itself as concrete concept, and beyond the words in which it expresses itself, would be superfluous. If we persist in this search, it is true that we abandon the conception of art as philosophy or history, but only to pass to the conception of art as *allegory*. And the unsurmountable difficulties of the allegory are well known, as its frigid and anti-historical character is known and universally felt. Allegory is the extrinsic union, the conventional and arbitrary juxtaposition of two spiritual acts, a concept or thought and an image, where it is assumed that this image must represent that concept. And not only is the individual char-

acter of the artistic image not explained by this, but, in addition, a duality is purposely created, because thought remains thought and image image in this juxtaposition, without relation between themselves; so much so, that in contemplating the image, we forget the concept without any disadvantage,—indeed, with advantage,—and in thinking the concept, we dissipate, also with advantage, the superfluous and tiresome image. Allegory enjoyed much favour in the Middle Ages, that mixture of Germanism and Romanism, of barbarism and culture, of bold fancy and of acute reflection; but it was the theoretic element in, and not the effective reality of, the same mediæval art which, where it is art, drives allegory away from or resolves it in itself. This need for the solution of allegorical dualism leads to the refining of the theory of intuition, in so far as it is allegory of the idea, into the other theory, of the intuition as—*symbol*; for the idea does not stand by itself in the symbol, thinkable separately from the symbolising representation, nor does the symbol stand by itself, representable in a lively manner without the idea symbolised. The idea is all reduced to representation (as said the æsthetician Vischer, if to anyone belongs the blame of the very prosaic comparison for so poetic and metaphysical a theme), like a lump of sugar melted in a glass of water, which exists and acts in every molecule of water, but is no longer to be found as a lump of sugar. But the idea that has disappeared, the idea that has become entirely representative, the idea that we can no longer succeed in seizing as idea (save by extracting it, like sugar from sugared water), is no longer idea, and is only the sign that the unity of the artistic image has not yet been achieved. Certainly art is symbol, all symbol—that is, all significant; but symbol of what? What does it mean? The intuition is truly artistic, it is truly intuition, and not a chaotic mass of

images, only when it has a vital principle that animates it, making it all one with itself; but what is this principle?

The answer to such a question may be said to result from the examination of the greatest ideal strife that has ever taken place in the field of art (and is not confined to the epoch that took its name from it and in which it was predominant): the strife between *romanticism* and *classicism*. Giving the general definition, here convenient, and setting aside minor and accidental determinations, romanticism asks of art, above all, the spontaneous and violent effusion of the affections, of love and hate, of anguish and jubilation, of desperation and elevation; and is willingly satisfied and pleased with vaporous and indeterminate images, broken and allusive in style, with vague suggestions, with approximate phrases, with powerful and troubled sketches: while classicism loves the peaceful soul, the wise design, figures studied in their characteristics and precise in outline, ponderation, equilibrium, clarity; and resolutely tends toward *representation*, as the other tends toward *feeling*. And whoever puts himself at one or the other point of view finds crowds of reasons for maintaining it and for confuting the opposite point of view; because (say the romantics), What is the use of an art, rich in beautiful images, which, nevertheless, does not speak to the heart? And if it do speak to the heart, what is the use if the images be not beautiful? And the others will say, What is the use of the shock of the passions, if the spirit do not rest upon a beautiful image? And if the image be beautiful, if our taste be satisfied, what matters the absence of those emotions which can all of them be obtained outside art, and which life does not fail to provide, sometimes in greater quantity than we desire?—But when we begin to feel weary of the fruitless defence of both partial views; above all, when we turn



away from the ordinary works of art produced by the romantic and classical schools, from works convulsed with passion or coldly decorous, and fix them on the works, not of the disciples, but of the masters, not of the mediocre, but of the supreme, we see the contest disappear in the distance and find ourselves unable to call the great portions of these works, romantic or classic or representative, because they are both classic and romantic, feelings and representations, a vigorous feeling which has become all most brilliant representation. Such, for example, are the works of Hellenic art, and such those of Italian poetry and art: the transcendentalism of the Middle Ages became fixed in the bronze of the Dantesque *terzina*; melancholy and suave fancy, in the transparency of the songs and sonnets of Petrarch; sage experience of life and badinage with the fables of the past, in the limpid *ottava rima* of Ariosto; heroism and the thought of death, in the perfect blank-verse hendecasyllabics of Foscolo; the infinite variety of everything, in the sober and austere songs of Giacomo Leopardi. Finally (be it said in parenthesis and without intending comparison with the other examples adduced), the voluptuous refinements and animal sensuality of international decadentism have received their most perfect expression in the prose and verse of an Italian, D'Annunzio. All these souls were profoundly passionate (all, even the serene Lodovico Ariosto, who was so amorous, so tender, and so often represses his emotion with a smile); their works of art are the eternal flower that springs from their passions.

These expressions and these critical judgments can be theoretically resumed in the formula, that what gives coherence and unity to the intuition is feeling: the intuition is really such because it represents a feeling, and can only appear from and upon that. Not the idea, but the feeling, is

what confers upon art the airy lightness of the symbol: an aspiration enclosed in the circle of a representation—that is art; and in it the aspiration alone stands for the representation, and the representation alone for the aspiration. Epic and lyric, or drama and lyric, are scholastic divisions of the indivisible: art is always lyrical—that is, epic and dramatic in feeling. What we admire in genuine works of art is the perfect fanciful form which a state of the soul assumes; and we call this life, unity, solidity of the work of art. What displeases us in the false and imperfect forms is the struggle of several different states of the soul not yet unified, their stratification, or mixture, their vacillating method, which obtains apparent unity from the will of the author, who for this purpose avails himself of an abstract plan or idea, or of extra-*æsthetic*, passionate emotion. A series of images which seem to be, each in turn, rich in power of conviction, leaves us nevertheless deluded and diffident, because we do not see them generated from a state of the soul, from a “sketch” (as the painters call it), from a motive; and they follow one another and crowd together without that precise intonation, without that accent, which comes from the heart. And what is the figure cut out from the background of the picture or transported and placed against another background, what is the personage of drama or of romance outside his relation with all the other personages and with the general action? And what is the value of this general action if it be not an action of the spirit of the author? The secular disputes concerning dramatic unity are interesting in this connection; they are first applied to the unity of “action” when they have been obtained from an extrinsic determination of time and place, and this finally applied to the unity of “interest,” and the interest would have to be in its turn dissolved in the interest of the spirit of

the poet—that is, in his intimate aspiration, in his feeling. The negative issue of the great dispute between classicists and romanticists is interesting, for it resulted in the negation both of the art which strives to distract and illude the soul as to the deficiency of the image with mere feeling, with the practical violence of feeling, with feeling that has not become contemplation, and of the art which, by means of the superficial clearness of the image, of drawing correctly false, of the word falsely correct, seeks to deceive as to its lack of inspiration and its lack of an æsthetic reason to justify what it has produced. A celebrated sentence uttered by an English critic, and become one of the commonplaces of journalism, states that “all the arts tend to the condition of music”; but it would have been more accurate to say that all the arts are music, if it be thus intended to emphasise the genesis of æsthetic images in feeling, excluding from their number those mechanically constructed or realistically ponderous. And another not less celebrated utterance of a Swiss semi-philosopher, which has had the like good or bad fortune of becoming trivial, discovers that “every landscape is a state of the soul”: which is indisputable, not because the landscape is landscape, but because the landscape is art.

Artistic intuition, then, is always *lyrical* intuition: this latter being a word that is not present as an adjective or definition of the first, but as a synonym, another of the synonyms that can be united to the several that I have mentioned already, and which, all of them, designate the intuition. And if it be sometimes convenient that instead of appearing as a synonym, it should assume the grammatical form of the adjective, that is only to make clear the difference between the intuition-image, or nexus of images (for what is called image is always a nexus of images, since image-atoms do not exist any more than thought-atoms), which

constitutes the organism, and, as organism, has its vital principle, which is the organism itself,—between this, which is true and proper intuition, and that false intuition which is a heap of images put together in play or intentionally or for some other practical purpose, the connection of which, being practical, shows itself to be not organic, but mechanic, when considered from the æsthetic point of view. But the word *lyric* would be redundant save in this explicative or polemical sense; and art is perfectly defined when it is simply defined as *intuition*.